

Balochistan: Time for Ceasefire and Political Settlement

Proposals for military de-escalation & a referendum on self-determination

By Peter Tatchell, human rights campaigner

The Samosa - London & Islamabad –

16 April 2010

<http://bit.ly/IfBUYv>

The case for a negotiated political settlement in Pakistani-annexed and occupied Balochistan is overwhelming. The Baloch people have a right to live without persecution and to decide their own destiny. History is on their side.

Much of what now constitutes Balochistan was a self-governing British Protectorate from 1876. The Baloch people secured their independence from Britain in 1947. The following year, they were invaded and incorporated into Pakistan. They did not vote for incorporation. Their consent was neither sought nor given.

For more than six decades, Balochistan has been under Pakistani military occupation. Although all five major nationalist rebellions have been suppressed by Islamabad, this has not extinguished the desire of the Baloch people to determine their own future. On the contrary. Pakistan's ruthless brutality has increased support for outright independence.

This has prompted even greater Pakistani repression. In the last two years, the extra-judicial killing of Baloch activists has intensified, despite public claims by the Pakistani government and security forces that they have been curtailed.

Indeed, a new death squad has emerged, Tehreek-e-Nefaz-e-Aman Balochistan (TNAB); apparently with the collusion of Pakistan's intelligence and military agencies.

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), in January this year alone the bullet-riddled bodies of 23 nationalist sympathisers were discovered in Balochistan, with six of these killings being claimed by TNAB.

From August 2011 to January 2012, 56 Baloch activists are known to have been murdered and dumped on roadsides.

The total number of extra-judicial killings since July 2010 is at least 271, reports the AHRC.

<http://bit.ly/HM0jF6>

These escalating human rights abuses in Balochistan are also independently corroborated by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These organisations have documented not only extra-judicial killings but also the Pakistani security forces widespread resort to kidnapping, disappearances, torture and detention without trial. They offer strong evidence that the police, army, ISI and Frontier Corps are complicit in atrocities that amount to crimes against humanity, which are illegal under international law.

Some Baloch campaigners are urging the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants and put on trial key Pakistani political, intelligence and military leaders, including the former dictator president, Pervez Musharraf, who allegedly authorised indiscriminate air strikes against defenceless Baloch villages.

In the meantime, they want the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, to head a UN fact-finding mission to Balochistan; in order to ensure that the atrocities committed by Pakistan are subject to independent international scrutiny and documentation.

The UN also has a crucial role to play in facilitating a military ceasefire and a negotiated political settlement.

While this is important for the long-suffering people of Balochistan, it is also important for the Pakistani government. The human rights abuses in Balochistan are causing huge damage to Islamabad's international reputation. The military occupation of Balochistan is costing Pakistan millions. It is a financial drain on the economy. The vast sums of money spent on military garrisons and operations would be better spent on health and education.

However, the most fundamental and important issue is the right to self-determination of the Baloch people. This principle of self-determination is enshrined in the UN Charter and has been applied to secure the statehood of new emergent nations, from Slovenia to East Timor and South Sudan. Why not Balochistan?

Pakistan can delay Balochistan's right to self-determination - at great financial, moral, political, military and reputational cost - but the right of the people Balochistan to decide their own future cannot be denied forever. History shows that no amount of repression can hold back a people who yearn to be free. Ultimately, justice will triumph. It is therefore in Islamabad's interest to secure a lasting political solution.

Last month, at the invitation of Baloch nationalists and human rights defenders, I spoke at a forum held at the UN in Geneva during the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council. My fellow speakers included the Pakistani author Tarek Fatah and the Baloch campaigners Mehran Baluch and Noordin Mengal. I supported their affirmation of the right to self-determination.

The big challenge that Baloch campaigners now face is how to achieve this goal.

While the terms and conditions of a peace deal must be decided by the people of Balochistan, in consultation with Baloch activists I have suggested the following six-point programme to deescalate the conflict and secure a negotiated political settlement:

Ceasefire and the cessation of all military operations, withdrawal of Pakistani troops and paramilitaries to barracks and a halt to the construction of new military bases and outposts - with independent monitoring and supervision by UN observers and peace-keepers.

Release of all political prisoners and a full account of the fate of all disappeared persons.

Open access to all parts of Balochistan for journalists, aid agencies and human rights organisations.

Right of return of displaced refugees, restoration of their property and compensation for losses caused by the conflict.

End inward colonisation of Balochistan by non-Baloch settlers.

UN-supervised referendum on self-determination, including the option of independence.

I reiterate that these are proposals for consideration and debate; with any final decisions being a matter for the people of Balochistan - hopefully with the support of their friends and allies in Pakistan. Six decades of conflict and repression is enough. It's time to talk peace, with justice.

Peter Tatchell is Director of the Peter Tatchell Foundation. For further articles by him about Balochistan:
<http://www.petertatchell.net/international/baluchistan/index.htm>

Copyright Asian Human Rights Commission 2012